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## **The Impact of Covid-19 on Election Campaign in Selected States of Nigeria**

**Muritala DAUDA, PhD**

*School of International Studies, College of Law, Government and International Studies (COLGIS), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia.*

*Corresponding email address: [kalmurtala@gmail.com](mailto:kalmurtala@gmail.com)*

### **Abstract**

The Covid-19 as global pandemic has greatly affected social and political activities of man. Campaign as part of political fora for political gladiators to show case what they are planning to do for the masses if they are elected to political offices through manifestos is being affected by Covid-19 pandemic. The study examines the impact of Covid-19 on election campaign for Gubernatorial seats in Edo and Ondo States of Nigeria scheduled to hold on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 and 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 respectively. Political parties in the two States have been directly or indirectly affected with the measures put in place by the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on Covid-19 in Nigeria which include social and physical distancing, avoid handshake and large gathering among others. The study observes that voters might lack political awareness and information that needed to weigh-in when comparing for best candidates among the contestants. The study adopts altruism theory of voting which emphasize the importance of one vote in an election for winners to emerge. The study is qualitative that uses secondary source of data to examine the phenomenon and the likely political behaviour of electorates during the prevalent global pandemic .

**Keywords:** Political Behaviour, Electioneering Campaign, Political Parties, Covid-19, Nigeria

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Election is a process through which masses choose candidates of their choice that will represent their interest during decision making. As opined by Shamir, Shamir and Levi (2015) that people do not restrict themselves only to voting during an election but also participate in politics through the following means: attuning to it, discussing it, participate in it among others. Election as a means of representative democracy avail the masses an opportunity to select or choose representatives. The process comprises of numerous political activities and gathering such as political campaign, political meetings, political talks and debates, manifestos, and others.

While considering peoples' choices among the contestants, electorates introduce varieties of factors to be considered in their degree of importance and uniqueness before making their final decision on rules of thumb (Chong & Druckman, 2007). One of the determinant variables that shape the decision of electorates towards candidates of their choice is manifestos. Manifestos mostly gets to the masses during campaign. This makes political campaign an important aspect of democratic process. Political parties sell candidates to

voters through a well structured manifestos deliver to a political gathering, meetings or forum in order to canvass for peoples' supports for the party to win in an election.

Having understand the importance of manifestos and campaign to political parties in order to have victory over their counterpart in an election, one will agree that its significant which cannot be over-emphasized in a democratic setting. Similarly, looking at the present situation in the whole world where no single country is left out with the spread of Covid-19 pandemic, it might not be easy for the convergence of crowd in form of political gathering which has made it difficult for parties to freely show case their promises and plans which can assist voters to choose creditably among the contestants.

For instance, some states in Nigeria (especially Edo State and Ondo State) where Gubernatorial elections have been fixed by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to hold on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 and 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 respectively. Political parties and their candidates in these two States have being faced with campaign problems and difficulties on how not to violate the rules and directives on crowd control given by Presidential Tasks Force (PTF) on Covid-19. It is against this backdrop that the study is examine the impact of Covid-19 on election campaign in selected States of Nigeria.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The study utilizes relevant literature on Covid-19, political behaviour and election campaign. The study is qualitative that employs secondary source of data. The secondary data is sourced through published and unpublished material produced from library and other search engines via books, journal articles, and newspapers.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The research makes use of altruism theory of voting. The theory is a model of voter behaviour which emphasizes the importance of electorates in a democratic setting and citizens social preference that condition their choice of vote for a particular candidates or party of their choice. The theory stresses on the probability and tendency of a single vote in determining the result of an election. As described by Riker and Ordeshook (1968), political information and awareness have a great role to play in canvassing for peoples' support for a candidate or party in an election. The political information can be disseminated to people through a well structured manifestos delivered in political gathering or campaign forum. Caplan (2007) equally stressed that information and promises made by parties on their candidates determine the willingness and eagerness of electorates to supports parties of their choice during an election.

The theory is relevant to the study especially on the significance of "one vote" in determining winner in an election. As part of democratic process where the voters are the kings in determining the outcome of an election, manifestos during political campaign has enormous impact in shaping the perception, believe and orientation of voters over parties' candidates. In absence of any political gathering such as campaign or political assembly where party manifestos could be disseminated, it is perhaps injurious to the future of democracy and at the same time it may lead to political apathy where few numbers of voters will participate in an election. Such might eventually lead to filling of a wrong candidate to the position of authority.

#### **4. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

The following are some of the germane definition of terms to the issue under the study phenomenon:

- **Covid-19** – This is a global pandemic that has a dramatic effect on people's lives. As stressed by Majeed (2020) and from the President (2020), Covid-19 is a pandemic that cut across all boundaries globally irrespective of race, sex, location among others. It is commonly known for the following symptoms: fever, dry cough, tiredness, aches and pain, diarrhea, sore throat, headache, loss of taste or smell among others. As a global practice to minimize the risk associated with the Covid-19, the federal government of Nigeria through Nigeria Centre For Disease Control (NCDC) in collaboration with PTF released protocol / directives as a measure to prevent spread of the virus. These measures include; avoid social gathering, maintaining social and physical distancing, avoid handshake, always stay in door system, frequent hand washing with soap and running water, use of alcohol hand sanitizer, among others.
- **Manifestos-** political manifestos is a published declaration of the intentions, motives or views of the issuer, be it an individual, group, political party or government. Manifestos is an action of making party's intention and plans known to the public while canvassing for peoples support and favour in an election.
- **Campaign-** this is a form of political gathering organized to achieve certain goals and objectives. Political campaign is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision making progress within a specific group.
- **Election-** This is a formal group decision-making process by which electorates choose representative that will stand and protect their interest. It is also an avenue for masses to participate in the decision making process of their country.
- **Voting-** this is a process whereby masses express their opinion on an issues related to decision making (Dauda, Adamu & Ahmodu-Tijani, 2019). It is a method for a group of individual to make a collective decision or opinion over general matter that has effect on their well-being.
- **Independent National Electoral Commission** – this is an independent body charged with the responsibility to register political parties and coordination of their affairs, register voters, conduct and supervise election, and announce the winner in an election. INEC is electoral body empowered by government of the federal republic of Nigeria to perform certain function.

#### **5. GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS' CAMPAIGN AMIDST OF COVID-19 IN EDO AND ONDO STATES OF NIGERIA**

Nigeria is a country in Africa. It is located in West Africa. It attained independence in 1960. The country has a population of over 195.9 million (Worldometers, 2018). The country has 36 States with its Federal Capital Territory situated in Abuja. Two (2) (Edo and Ondo States) of the 36 States are to conduct elections to the gubernatorial seats slated for 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 and 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 respectively.

**a. Edo State** – this is a state located in Southern Nigeria. Its capital is Benin City. The estimated population of the State as at 2014 is 5 million with about 17,802 km<sup>2</sup> landmass. The State has four major ethnic groups: Bini, Etsako, Esan and Owan. Table 1.0. below indicates the political parties and their candidates contesting for the governorship seat in Edo State:

**Table 1.0. List of Parties and Gubernatorial Candidates Aspiring in Edo State**

| S/N | Party Acronyms | Name of Candidate       | Gender |
|-----|----------------|-------------------------|--------|
| 1   | AA             | Edemakhiota Godwin O.   | Male   |
| 2   | ADC            | Mabel Akomu O.          | Female |
| 3   | ADP            | Iboi Lucky E            | Male   |
| 4   | APC            | Osagie Andrew Ize-Iyamu | Male   |
| 5   | APGA           | Osagie Lucky I.         | Male   |
| 6   | APP            | Amos Osalumese A.       | Male   |
| 7.  | APM            | Igbineweka Osamuede     | Male   |
| 8.  | LP             | Osifo Uhun-Ekpenma I.   | Male   |
| 9   | NNPP           | Agol Ebun T.            | Female |
| 10  | NRM            | Stevie Nash O.          | Male   |
| 11  | PDP            | Godwin N. Obaseki       | Male   |
| 12  | SDP            | Felix Izekor O.         | Male   |
| 13  | YPP            | Osagiobare Jones        | Male   |
| 14  | ZLP            | Akhalamhe Amiemenoghena | Male   |

Source: [www.inecnigeria.org/edo](http://www.inecnigeria.org/edo), Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

The above table 1.0 indicates that 14 political parties in Edo State, filled-in candidates for the gubernatorial race in the State

**b. Ondo State** – the State is created on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1976 from the former Western State. Its capital is Akure. The State borders include Ekiti State to the North, Edo State to the East, Kogi State to the Northeast, Ogun State to the Southwest, and Osun State to the Northwest. The State has a population of 3,460,877 as at 2006 population Census with 15,500km<sup>2</sup>. The ethnic composition of Ondo State is largely Yoruba. Similar to the Edo State, the following political parties and candidates as tabulated in Table 1.1 below, are vying for governorship seat in Ondo State:

**Table 1.1. List of Parties and Gubernatorial Candidates in Ondo State**

| S/N | Party Acronyms | Name of Candidate      | Gender |
|-----|----------------|------------------------|--------|
| 1   | A              | Rotimi Adeleye A.      | Male   |
| 2   | AA             | Joshua Oluwafemi A.    | Male   |
| 3   | AAC            | Adeleye Adekunle P.    | Male   |
| 4   | ADC            | Adelegan Adedapo O.    | Male   |
| 5   | ADP            | Martin Kunle O.        | Male   |
| 6   | APC            | Oluwarotimi Odunayo A. | Male   |
| 7   | APGA           | Olowoloba Dele         | Male   |
| 8   | APM            | Aminu Akeem O.         | Male   |
| 9   | APP            | Adesanya Olaoluwa      | Male   |
| 10  | LP             | Okunade Taiwo          | Male   |
| 11  | NNPP           | Ojajuni Joseph E.      | Male   |

|    |     |                      |        |
|----|-----|----------------------|--------|
| 12 | NRM | Funmilayo Jenyo A.   | Female |
| 13 | PDP | Eyitayo Olayinka J.  | Male   |
| 14 | PRP | Babatunde Francis A. | Male   |
| 15 | SDP | Fasua Peter O.       | Male   |
| 16 | YPP | Ojon Dotun           | Male   |
| 17 | ZLP | Benjamin Jairus O.   | Male   |

Source: [www.inecnigeria.org/ondo](http://www.inecnigeria.org/ondo), Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

Similarly, table 1.1 shows that 17 political parties in Ondo State, filled-in aspirants for the gubernatorial race in the State

## **6. DIRECTIVES FROM PTF, NCDC THROUGH INEC TO GUIDE PARTIES IN THEIR CAMPAIGNS**

As part of regulating and curbing the spread of Covid-19 in the country and particularly in those States (Edo and Ondo States) where gubernatorial elections will hold, the PTF in collaboration with NCDC through INEC have issued campaign guidelines to political parties which must be adhered to, during campaign programmes. Some of the directives/general protective measures as contained in INEC Protocol (2020) include:

- Partial Lockdown
- The rule of social and physical distancing shall be enforced
- Avoid large crowd or gathering, gathering above 20 people should be discouraged.
- Avoid of hand shake
- Mandatory use of face masks
- Use of Infrared thermometers
- Alcohol based hand sanitizers is encouraged
- All prevailing protocol shall be observed will strict adherence

Having observed the above protocols, one will argue that all parties contesting for gubernatorial seats will be affected by the directives particular during their manifestos. Campaign activities that in most case assist to disseminate information to voters particularly, the illiterate ones (who constitute larger percent of voters) might not be achieved (Lefever, 2016). As a result of this, fewer numbers of people is likely to participate in the election campaign. For instance, it was reported by Enoghlease and Aliu (2020) that there were low turnout of people at the All Progressive Congress (APC) campaign in Benin city, Edo State due to the enforcement of locked down as part of the measures to curtail the spread of deadly virus in Nigeria. Similarly, it was also revealed in Ondo State that people did not come out en masse as expected to attend the party campaign (Premium Times, 2020).

Apart from the fear of sanction by government for the likely violation of the Covid-19 guidelines, electorates too are fully aware of the havoc that has caused and that can cause by the Covid-19 pandemic globally. This alone is capable of pushing the masses back from attending political campaign or gathering. As a result of this, voters might not be adequately carried along with the proposed plans and programme of parties that entrenched in the party's manifestos. This may lead to in-adequate political information and awareness to the masses. Whenever there is little or no adequate political information and awareness to the electorates, there is great tendency for political apathy, low turnout of voters in elections, possibility of filling the vacuum with wrong candidates and its sorts

(Caplan, 2007). As important as single vote from electorate, is capable of making a wrong candidate to have victory over a right candidate due to campaign processes that was unable to carried-out effectively and accordingly as a result of Covid-19 pandemic.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

In actual fact, the study has reveal that the existence of Covid-19 pandemic will have effect on whatever the result of elections are in both Edo and Ondo States. Similarly, the country's electoral body, INEC and the government of the federal republic of Nigeria have also discovered how significant is political campaigns to parties as a channel of educating and enlightening voters about the needed information to change the political leadership of a State for better. Therefore, party campaigns as a form of democratic process has a great role to play in shaping the perception of masses over political issue(s). While not having an enabling environment for parties to efficiently showcase their manifestos to the general public due to Covid-19 measures will undoubtedly affect the people decision on the candidates chosen to represent their interests at the helm of affairs.

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